

The Exodus : History and Lore

Table of Contents

[TLDR](#)

[World History](#)

[Summary](#)

[The Dark Wars](#)

[Warrior Kings](#)

[The Battle of Everfall Reach](#)

[The Quellings](#)

[Timeline and Maps](#)

[The Known Realms](#)

[Omphalos](#)

[The Shade](#)

[The Shine](#)

[Primordia](#)

[Eteria](#)

[Nihilora](#)

[Omphalus's Kingdom](#)

[The Empirical Coalition](#)

[Icrinoulon Guardianship](#)

[Thidabet Commonwealth](#)

[Aetaitish Principalities](#)

[Brivo](#)

[Anuenue Tundra](#)

[Caelia](#)

[Omphalus Geography](#)

[Castennes](#)

[Honey Bear Tavern](#)

[Castennes Mines](#)

[Old Portal Site](#)

[New Pier](#)

[Old Pier](#)

[Guild Hall](#)

[Castenne Manor](#)

[Castenne Catacombs](#)

[The Keep's Territory](#)

[Tidabet Commonwealth](#)

[The Dead Sea](#)

[The Forge Main Facilities](#)

[Organizations](#)

[The Keep](#)

[The Drunken Forge](#)

[Monster Encyclopedia](#)

[Monster](#)

[Beast](#)

[Titan](#)

[NPC Library](#)

[Trigger Troupe](#)

[Constants](#)

["Z" Xerkuth](#)

[Valamin Riverfoot](#)

[Pup](#)

[Mimzy](#)

[Lulu](#)

[The Castennes](#)

[The Late Duke Neopolatian Castennes - Warrior King of the Iron Rights](#)

[Francis "Fran"](#)

[The Changelings](#)

[Haje - "Healer"](#)

[Rjo - "Cryer"](#)

[Toa - "Standoffish"](#)

[Ilye and Jyx - "The Other Two"](#)

["Teenager"](#)

[Old Man Cooley](#)

["Bec"](#)

[The Drunken Forge](#)

[Pebbles Ruhmallath](#)

[Cirohsa](#)

[Pyrhha](#)

[Dazas Ruhmallath](#)

[Nieve](#)

[Alba Tross](#)

[Lishara Ruhmallath](#)

[The Keep](#)

[Demirr Wit](#)

[Cotnatia of The Keep](#)

[Emerie of The Keep](#)

[The Old Guard](#)

[Delsu "The Stringent" Strato](#)

[Lette "The Augury" Strato](#)

[Brivo](#)

[Infanta Seraphine](#)
[General Emeritus Thorne Ironhide](#)
[Baroness Willel](#)
[Sir Mhin](#)
[Magus Umbra](#)
[Countess Ivia](#)
[Duke Orion](#)
[Lady Celeste](#)
[Eastern Consort Meyra](#)
[Southern Consort Ezarea](#)
[Western Consort Zenaya](#)
[Northern Consort Kresit](#)
[High King Arian](#)

[One-Offs](#)

[Midas "Gilded Death" Astalli-Outlast](#)
[River Astalli-Outlast](#)
[Rouse and Leer](#)

[Arcane Misfits](#)

[Biscuit the Blight](#)
[Captain Hoska of The Gilliflower](#)
[Princess Anela Manaia](#)
[Tenumbra "Gold" Loste](#)
[Emperor Zerem Kin](#)
[Royal Family of the Tundra](#)

[Arc BreakDown - Arcane Misfits](#)

[Epilogue Written By ITSARIXY](#)

[Arc Breakdowns - Trigger Troupe](#)

[Beneath the Surface - The Castennes \(Written by Bryce/Fawkes\)](#)

TLDR

Eons ago, there existed five realms that fed the creation of a sixth. The realm existed in Unity with each other, aiding trade, cultural exchanges, and more. But 85 years ago, a dark force leaked into the realms, sending all into chaos and leading to The Dark Wars. The Battle of Everfall marked the war's end, a protracted conflict that spanned all dimensions, but the portals to other realms were shut. Leaving Omphalus to die alone. Despite many efforts to revive the portal, panic, fear, and sudden changes of leadership have led to a post-war world struggling to find the posterity it once knew

World History

Summary

Eons ago, the realms came to be. Though rumors, myths, and legends circle, no one is certain of how to speak of a world that once was long before our own. Nevertheless, life went into the world and created five realms that connected but were unable to reach one another. The realms spent ages searching for ways to reach out to one another, searching for a place to congregate safely. And they found it in a barren and desolate realm, Omphalos—a domain where they could exist without complications and travel freely. A realm within the center of the five, they created interconnecting systems of portals and gateways, sharing secrets and lives in ways their homes did not allow. As time passed, every footstep, every magic cast, and everything they built within that realm slowly grew and evolved into its world, energy, and existence. A new realm began to thrive from the broken earth, and with it came its own life. Though younger than the others, races celebrated them wholeheartedly. So the seven realms remained in a makeshift peace and happiness, trading, providing, and strengthening their bonds until one domain could no longer exist without the other. Instinctively linked, the realms flourished for ages in a steady peace.

The Dark Wars

85 years ago, dark forces began to leak into the realms, unnoticeable at first, but their attacks became bolder and more frequent. Though the realms tried, they could not identify the source of these enemies and began to turn on their allies. Eternia cast blame on Nihilora, Nihilora blamed The Shine and their antics, and The Shine cast doubt upon Primordial, who raged against The Shade. Despite the looming threat, the realms remained in a 5-year Cold War, refusing to aid the others with their battle and ignoring the growing threats to their realm. It wasn't until a central portal on Omphalos was overtaken that the stalemate ended, and the realms hesitantly pulled together to combat the threat. By this time, the threat of the dark force had nearly overrun and dug its roots into every realm. What was once an infection grew into a

plagued blight that threatened to destroy them all, and what they'd hoped would be a long battle brewed into an 80-year-long war.

The dark wars raged on throughout every realm and corner of the world. Realms were nearly destroyed as populations were wiped out through plague and violence. Sacred lands were demolished, and monuments to the peace that once existed were rubble. Many were born and died during the war, and few could remember what peace truly was.

Blights

Warrior Kings

Throughout the war, many arose to a higher calling. From humble farmers who took up arms to protect their families and lands, scholars who studied and learned ways to successfully defend resources from the dark forces, and healers who threw aside their own safety to aid those within the line of fire. These individuals became local and national heroes, earning nicknames and titles from the citizens and accolades from the ruling nobles. Over time, these individuals became known as Warrior Kings, as even those who'd never seen the sight of blood gained their kingdoms through battle.

The Battle of Everfall Reach

20 years ago, The Battle of Everfall Reach took place within Omphalos. A week-long battle at one of the first portals ever generated. The worlds waited on the bated breath in an unending and uneasy silence. Until miraculously, the tendrils of the dark forces pulled back and disappeared entirely. Few returned from the fight alive, and those who did spoke only of victory and refused to utter another word of the event. The location became known as a black sight, walled off from the rest of the world and left as the final destruction of the war.

Nevertheless, the dark forces had been defeated, and the realms celebrated their victory, announcing holidays and reconstruction efforts. Plans were made to return to the bright past they'd fought for. But the barrier between realms wavered, and with the strain of the war, the domains themselves began to pull away from one another. One by one, contact with the other realms became impossible despite all efforts. Those who had been far from home found themselves trapped.

Omphalos took this best and brightest and devoted them to the restoration of the outside realms. The efforts remained vital for the first few years, but a more prominent problem began to arise from their own home. Reports came in that crops were decaying at the vine, animals were dying off from unknown infections as though life was simply sucked out of them, the oceans became calm, and their life retreated deeper into the darkest parts of the waters, paladin and clerical orders found their prayers and cries go unanswered. Magic itself began to falter and fail.

The Quellings

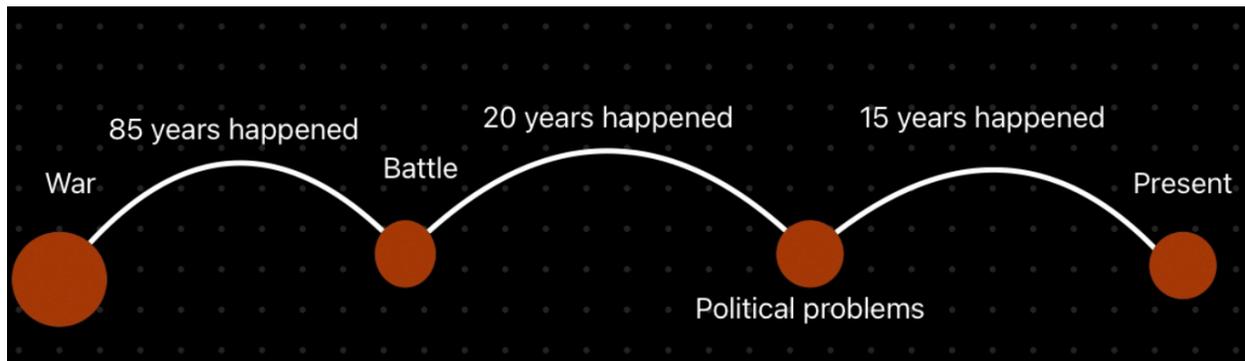
Within the next 15 years, a political and social uproar occurred, the likes of which the realms had never seen. The warrior Kings that arose to fame throughout the wars took over control of an aggravated masses. In doing so, hundreds of nobles and lineages found themselves displaced and executed on baseless charges. The dissolution of several Clerical, Druidic, and Monastic orders occurred en masse. Species from other realms were subject to prejudice and witch hunts as many were driven into hiding or extinction within Omphalos. Many were orphaned or abandoned in the world and taken in by the remaining orders of peace as examples. The remaining beasts of the realm were hunted into extinction for fear of their unrivaled powers.

Yet, within all of the hopelessness, innovation began to take precedence over a return to tradition. Omphalos entered an industrial era, producing new weapons, technology, and inventions regularly, with little care being placed into its effects on the broken world. In addition, a new order began to arise from the remnants of the wars. Blood hunters, who'd alter their bodies to compete with the supernatural entities they'd encounter, rose to fame as Monster Hunters and Saviors for Omphalos.

Within the present day, the age of the warrior kings is declining as magic continues to fade and the dangers of new technology become more potent. Collusion and looming paranoia threaten the land as famine and eternal disputes linger over the heads of all. Though many are still desperately searching for a return to the past, others have made a stake of their home, finding solace in the darkest corners.

Timeline and Maps

(political problems = Quellings)





The Known Realms

The known Realms is a term that applies to the six main realms within this universe. Though more are believed to exist as their presence is felt throughout their existence. It is nearly impossible to transverse these realms. As such, these realms are referred to as the Forgotten Realms by scholars.

Each realm serves a purpose and presents unique opportunities for the other realms. In this way, the realms cannot survive long without the others and must remain in a metaphorical and literal connection to thrive.

Both the Shine and the Shade are known for their magics, deals, and wisdom. While one will twist and sway, the other is direct and brutish. Through them, arcane flows.

Eteria and Primordia form the basis of life within Omphalos and many other realms. While Eteria provides the foundations of life, Primordia provides the elements it needs to thrive. They are sources of stability and provide as such to the worlds beyond their own.

Nihilora and Omphalos serve as connections for the realms. While Omphalos served as a physical connector, Nihilora served as a metaphysical one, ensuring the realms remained together rather than floating into the voids of nothingness surrounding them.

Omphalos

Nexus Realm (Your Home Realm)

Home to Humans, Elves, Dwarves, Orcs, Goblins, Harpies and Halflings.

Omphalos embodied the essence of its namesake, serving as a hub of the six known realms. Omphalos helped to resolve the impossible, offering a trustworthy and safe place for all citizens of the realms to meet and travel. It quickly became impossible to travel to other realms without passing through Omphalos. Over the centuries, the magic and nature of the other realms bled into Omphalos, providing it with fauna, creating magic all of its own, and, finally, inhabitants. No one had expected the nexus realm to support such lives. But it was celebrated nonetheless.

After the dark wars, the portals shut down, slowly pulling the influences of the other realms alongside them, resulting in a lack of magic and resources. The residents of Omphalos worked tirelessly to survive, forming new systems of magic, government, and technology to support and maintain their dying world.

A land that stands for the accumulation of the gifts of the other realms, from the sprawling mountains to the endless forests and seas. Omphalos cannot be summarized as it holds so many pieces of the other realms given form and stability through its very nature.

The Shade

Retribution Realm

Home to Tieflings, Demons, Spirits, and Wraiths (All Spiritual)

A realm known as a source of great evil, this realm is one of justice and divine retribution. It serves as a mirror to the shine, providing stability to its chaos. It is known for its discipline and unrelenting nature, as its inhabitants are absolute in all manners of being. Dawning hardened armor, horns, and brimstone fires, this realm takes on the role of divine enforcers acting as judge, jury, and executioner for many unlucky souls, as the bringers of justice for those who've been wronged.

No one knows the state of this realm after the dark wars, but it is believed that citizens of this realm have access to a private means of traveling to Omphalos that has yet to be shut down.

Much of The Shade is overshadowed by pillaring obelisks and stalagmites of obsidian

and similarly dark materials, above and between rivers of glowing ruby ichor that form their cities against a blazing red sky devoid of sun or moon. Chains interlocking each protrusion, giving methods of travel to those lacking the gift of flight. Similarly, floating rock and rumble make up the outer cities and farmlands, held together in crude paths by these chains.

The Shine

Aether Realm

Home of Goblin, Eladrin, Satyrs, Centaurs, Firebolg, Changelings and Alarunes

The Shine is believed to be the home of true wild magic. It embodies chaos and wildness with the broader world in stories, mischief, and miracles. An everchanging land of shifting rules and natures, it is united under the Kyng Titania, which governs all aspects and keeps the realm habitable. This realm commands and reflects its inhabitants. Both remain in a Protean state while connected, continually growing, shifting, and healing.

Due to its ever-changing nature, the Shine is believed to have taken the least damage during the dark wars. However, many of its natural citizens feel the loss of their home on a physical and near-painful level and have worked harder than most to return.

The Shine exists like a dream, ever-shifting, swaying, reflecting, and refracting. This is ever persistent in the crystalline nature of the Shine, with structures, plants, and even the waters themselves being comprised of ragged glass-like crystals that sway in shape, flow sound, density, and color pending on the light given to them by the three suns and two moons that decorate the land. Those in touch with the Shine can alter and manipulate the crystals to an extent, shaping houses and entire courtrooms into their style.

The Shine is ruled by Titania.

Primordia

Elemental Realm

Home to Genesis, Gjinn, Aasimars, Dragonborns and Nymphs

Primordia is a realm where the purest essence of the elements converges, shaping the very foundation of reality. It is a place of raw power and unbridled energy, where the forces of fire, water, earth, and air collide in a magnificent display of elemental might. Primordia is nearly impossible to transverse by those who lack a similar fundamental connection as its inhabitants, who can become one with their very home. Despite this, the natives worked to provide their gifts to the other realms in the form of stability and advantages of power.

The state of Primordia is currently unknown, as no one had heard from them after the final battle. Even before the portals closed, they remained silent to all, including their own. Those displaced from this realm have found solace in the elements of their new homes, utilizing them to survive and grow.

Eteria

Wild Realm

Home of Lionens, Loxodons, Yuan-ti, Turtle, Kobold, Aakrockoca and Lizardfolk

Eteria is a realm of untamed primal energy where the essence of life flows in abundance. A domain where animalistic instincts and primal magic thrive, it is often believed to be the birthplace of life and miracles. The realm pulsates with vibrant energy, teeming with lush forests, vast grasslands, and sacred groves. Many rumors and myths still uphold that Eteria is home to the Tree of Life, whose roots continue to reach out and feed the other realms.

After the dark wars, Eteria was scarred beyond recognition. With their forests destroyed and many of its civilians unable to heal from the wounds, they were among the first to retreat within the war, serving as a home for refugees throughout the battles.

Nihilora

Void Nexus

Home of Mindflayer, Simic, Vedalken, Kalashtar, and Plasmoids

Nihilora is a realm of crossroads to the metaphysical and spiritual. A land of vast nothingness, it gains its structure and power from those within it. Converging the enigmatic realm with psychic and spiritual energies, Nihilora is a land truly shaped by the mind of the will of its people. Each city and structure within the realm is created through the wills of every inhabitant, intermingling to create a web solid enough to stand and build upon. For this reason, Nihilora is known as the spiritual and psychic realm. Nihilora is also believed to be the birthplace of many Monastic Orders and fighting styles.

The Dark War had little effect on Nihilora despite losing many of its citizens and, thus, cities. But so long as one person remains within Nihilora, the realm will thrive.

Pantheon of the Realms

The Pantheon of Gods oversees the realms, their creation and all aspects of their functions. Gods come from many sources including concepts and collective cultural iterations or beliefs.

They are ruled by a court of Prime Gods who will oversee all additional gods. An uprising or shifting of the pantheon often causes whatever remains of the mortal world to be thrown into chaos and destroyed. As such, the turnover of a Pantheon is heavily associated with Armageddon.

The gods hold no name or identity, only titles bestowed upon them. As such they have no sense of self and will operate in the way their core concept would dictate.

Guardian Gods

The direct children of the current pantheon were tasked with protecting one of the six realms. The system had been implemented many eons ago (during the Final War of the Gods when they retreated) to ensure the realms' safety without their direct interference. Created when the Prime became aware of the threat the god of hope would pose to them, their effort to leave something behind when they're killed to protect their world. The guardian gods are a literal response to the question, "what is your response to life and the fact you must live it?" Some want to be memorialized, some grieve, some live without shame, some find beauty, some hold those they love close, and others learn all they can. Each is described by an action they took, normally the action that formed their paladin's oath

Current Prime Gods -

Represent the cyclic nature of their world and that the cycle is coming to its end (Phaseless is what is constant, Fleeting is what deviates that constant on a whim, Conflict is what sparks those deviations or a desire for them and Hope is the literal desperation for those deviations). Each is described by their nature, faceless, fleeting and beating and all titles after That are culturally dependent

Omphalus's Kingdom

Within Omphalus, many kingdoms can be found. Although there were far more before the war, the remaining kingdoms still boast a long and honorable history.

The Empirical Coalition

After the dark wars, amid chaos and loss of magic at such a pivotal time, the remaining kingdoms and nations banded together in a desperate attempt to consolidate resources and knowledge. Though they were initially ruled under a consortium, years later, three emperors emerged from the top of this council to oversee the others. Within the 15 years of their reign, warrior kings were given formal titles and resources, while those who'd lost their power, such as

magicians or churches, were stripped of their status. Research began to focus on technology over magic. Efforts were made to consolidate the remaining lands that retained their autonomy, including tribal lands, counties, or farther kingdoms, into their fold both for their safety and to assist in the universal rebuilding efforts.

There were at least 50 warrior kings informally. All were rewarded in some capacity, but only 19 Warrior Kings were formally given territory and titles to replace the former rulers of each area. 14 (now 13) remain today within their power, and 3 are the Emperors who oversee everything to this day.

Icrinoulon Guardianship

A military nation named after the heroic group who liberated the mountains from Giants destroying them. Due to the weather and terrain, it quickly became home to Dwarves, who valued its resources. They're famed for their craftsmanship, military tactics, impenetrable armies, and extensive collections of stories and myths. The Guardianship is ruled by the families of those five heroes, with the mountains being split between them evenly and a council held to allow them to rule the Guardianship. This kingdom takes on heavy Norse and Siberian influence in many aspects, including more European ones.

Names are everything for this kingdom and many dwarves. Your last name holds a history of who you come from, and your first name holds what you achieved. Any title you receive during both life and death marks a testament to your own greatness. Dwarves do not choose to honor themselves or their achievements personally. Instead, most choose to live lives of greatness, accomplishment, and heroism, hoping that the name they receive and songs sung about them will be enough to make their families proud. In this way, much of the dwarven traditions follow record-keeping and immortalizing, from stain glasses of battles, embroidery of diplomatic success, and even poetry is all used to immortalize the works of those you look up to and care for, in hopes the same will be done for you one day. It's widely believed that the Dwarves held onto the remaining history before the war and before Omphalus became a hub for the realms due to these traditions.

Their few holidays are a celebration of achievements that benefitted their clans as a whole or recent successes that have earned such celebrations. Beyond these, most events are small and personal, including weddings, blessings, and similar rites. The only extravagant events is funerals, in which every work priorly created in their honor is displayed, and 100s of more are made to dedicate their achievements.

Little to no information is known about them currently. After the war, they took heavy losses. However, after the battle of Everfall Reach, the kingdom fully sealed its borders outside those insane and desperate enough to brave the unforgiving terrain alone.

Thidabet Commonwealth

The Tidabet Commonwealth is the only fully democratic nation in Omphalus and is comprised entirely of Tritons and aquatic creatures. The Commonwealth is one of the newer kingdoms, though still older than the Dark War. Formally known for their healing practices and inventive infrastructures, they are now known for their innovation in technology and machinery. Pulling heavily from the diversity of African cultures in all aspects.

For much of history, the oceanic regions were home to an array of small tribes that would break apart and come together in a way similar to the unpredictability of the ocean itself. But after a rising threat from Tempests, many of the creatures of the sea banded together to defeat the beast and began acting their will to protect the oceans. One by one, they brought more into their fold, from humanoid to deep sea creatures, united in a rare display of harmony to benefit their home.

The Commonwealth has no true culture and instead hosts many practices, traditions, and the like for each of the people under it. One of the few universals held by the commonwealth is a deep reverence for the moon, sun, and other celestial bodies. Any and all major alignments of these are celebrated with ceremonies, prayers, migration, or anything else the different species and tribes use to mark significance in their own way. Formally, their connection to magic was innate-like elves but pulled more heavily in forms of healing, crafting, and effecting of natural occurrences like the waves. All are believed to be gifts from these heavenly bodies, though nature differs for each tribe.

The Commonwealth sees an array of leadership, often, they'll elect an Emissary to speak to other kingdoms and inform of their decisions and act as an informal leader. But formally, a handful of intelligent and capable are elected to an overseeing council that takes in and processes information, drafts formal decrees based on decisions made, and hosts debates from the citizens Tibadet. Much of their work advocates for varying possibilities so that all information and approaches can be presented to the people.

Tibadet fought greatly in the war and took heavy damages, being forced to elect councilmen to make emergency decisions without the votes of the people to rebuild more efficiently. They've refused to join the empire and have suffered significant damage in the form of pollution since the end of the war. This is widely believed to be because of their own greed and desperation, forcing them to turn to alternative income sources to rebuild. Thidabet hosted much commerce after the war, including The Drunken Forge. Despite their system allowing civilians to vote on matters of the forge, no such action has been taken due to their medical knowledge, believed to be a return to their former years as renowned healers.

Aetaitish Principalities

The Aetaitish Principalities was formally a Kingdom ruled mainly by elves. Sporting a long history, they're best known for many artisan crafts, an innate attunement to magic, creative forgery or silver weapons, and a high reverence for the cycles of life and death. Now, the Elven Principalties are fully isolated lands walled off from the world to protect the elven kind after the fall of their king. Due to their long lives, the absence of their king has created a stir, leading to them being led by an unending series of princes who are constantly at war in a long battle of succession. Though not falling to racism, rejection of half-elves from the Principalities has become common for fear of discovering more princes to the rising numbers. Much of their culture is pulled from that of the Chinese, mainly architecture and fashion, and mainly from the Han Dynasty.

One thing that separates elves from other races is their long lifespan, which is believed to come from their connection to fae and fae-like creatures. Because of this, elves consistently fight the common pitfalls of long age, mainly the apathy, greed, and resentment it often breeds. Rather than worshiping the nature and earth that have lived so long as they have, they worship the nature of life and its cyclic presence in all things. Most of their traditions, holidays, and practices revolve around stages of life, from birth to adolescence, adulthood, and death. They even have several traditions marking middle points, such as discovering your craft, new skills, walking, first loves, last loves, and more. Similarly, every season is celebrated, with elaborate ceremonies for the equinoxes and solstices. In addition, they hold remembrance and ceremonies for any time this cycle is disrupted, loss of sight preventing you from continuing your craft, or a massive plague. Anything that breaks the consistency is mourned.

Magic played a daily role for them, being so ingrained in their lives that many of their crafts, machinery, and clothing wouldn't be functional without it. Due to the fall of magic, many of their traditions and customs became threatened during and after the war.

Near the end of the war, the king set out a decree stating any of his children could have the right to the throne, no matter their mother. Through varying circumstances, this led to a nearly 40-year-long standstill as the kingdom split itself into a principality ruled by his children in a less-than-harmonious manner. The devastation of the war made it impossible to hold remembrances for every disruption to their natural order, leading to a rise in altered rituals to attempt to find a new path forward and discussions over what the cycle is meant to become in times of such world-ending events.

Brivo

Ruled by a High King and four consorts of his choice who take over unique duties within the Kingdom. Brivo, while not the oldest of kingdoms, has one of the longest histories of the nations. Originally created as an outpost colony for Eteria to ship items and delegates throughout Omphalus, it housed several smaller portals to other realms, making it a hotspot for travel and cultural exchange. Additionally, it was once also a sight of pilgrimage for many druidic orders due to the many shrines that appeared nearby as a result. After an incident involving the local

sphinx, four heroes rose up from Brivo to strike a deal amongst the creatures, earning the outpost a new level of respect equal to that of the kingdoms. Over the years, Brivo became its own nation yet still kept its close ties to the Eteria and supported them for centuries.

Brivo pulls heavy inspiration from Middle Eastern and Indian traditions and cultures when it comes to most things, with certain exceptional characters pulled from Egyptian culture and roots (Namely, the Northern Consort). Brivo holds a unique artistic history and style as a result of the combined influence of Omphalian techniques on Eterian art forms. This extended to Textiles, metalworking, beading painting, Performances, Poetry, Music, and much more, creating a high demand for the beautiful works of Brivans.

The vast majority of Brivo's Cultures, holidays, and traditions come from Eteria, including holidays, celebrations, and the rites of passage celebrated. After the war, Brivo remained separated from its mother dimension and saw the chaos of the coming political landscape with clarity. They made the decision to lock themselves off from the rest of the world outside of trade, and delegations were sent out but never received guests within. They consolidated the villages and towns surrounding their capital city and brought in the Druidic circles in hopes of protecting them under their universal banner. Despite holding many druidic circles and powerful mages, Brivo has still struggled with the same struggles as other nations when it comes to the decline of its magic users. With many of their citizens being from other realms, the lack of connection has come with unwanted consequences such as loss of flight, strength, and, in extreme cases, death.

Anuenue Tundra

The Anuenue Tundra is a small kingdom made up of fragmented isles, dense ice glaciers, hot springlike rivers that hold it together, and a massive volcano that endlessly pumps out ash and soot to the world below. The kingdom is ruled by the Manaia family and often has siblings or spouses of the ruler, overtaking vital internal roles such as General or Magus. Due to their proximity to the Volcano and its constantly active state, the people of the Tundra are often more accustomed to weather changes and dense air, making them far stronger than the average mortal. The

Standing as one of the few kingdoms that survived the Dark Wars and its destruction of the world, Through a combination of luck and careful resource planning, they not only survived but held onto their positions as one of the higher powers of Omphalus much to the chagrin of the Imperium. Though many theories exist on the true sounding story of the Tundra, it is well known that the kingdom holds the blessing of a dragon, granting its royal family gifts as aspects of the dragon and its citizen's access to warm in any cold, commonly in the form of the hot springs and volcanic ash that enriches the soils.

The Tundra pulls heavily from Polynesian and Native American influences in terms of their people, speech, and architecture, as well as their beliefs on the value of life and the care of others. Caelia holds two seasons, only summer and winter snow. The summer snow is made

mainly of volcanic ash, and the winter snow is true snow and ice. Many of their traditions and holidays revolve around the changing of the seasons, the coming and going of the wildlife in their lands, and even the first of the lava flows. Within their personal lives, the tundra holds many celebrations to honor major events within their history, be it their founding day or the marriages of their royal family and, in some cases, the birth of children to families that have tried for years. The tundra is a communal kingdom due to its size, and while they don't hold many universal celebrations, they're well known for coming together to celebrate the major achievements of everyday life. Much of Caelia's crafts come from the volcanic nature of their environment, including obsidian armor, weaponry, and sculptures to make up their homes, gateways, and even parts of their ships. In addition, the Tundra hold a unique history in their dance and music, which is often combined with their sculpting in patterns to tell wider stories.

Caelia

Deep beneath the surface of the Imperium and Mountains of the Guardianship lies a sleeping theocracy of outcasts. Ruled by the Two High Priestesses of the corresponding churches of Caelia, these priestesses rely on advice from a Senate constructed of trusted community leaders and an oracle who is said to receive commands from the Gods directly. Caelia is one of the youngest kingdoms within Omphalus, formed as a result of the persecution endured by a number of different races and groups during the Imperium's founding. Most of their citizens escaped into the underground mines and natural caverns that had long existed within the territories. Due to their taking over the mines and their resources, as well as their strange connection to two mythical gods, they remain untouchable by the other kingdoms, but to ensure their safety, Caelia remains locked off from outsiders who hold connections to the world above and refuses to allow any of its citizens to leave. For the past few years, conflicts have arisen between the two churches of Caelia. The two never served as one and held polar beliefs. Some worshiped the many-limbed goddess, named for the light in the darkest night, whilst others worshiped the vibrant hummingbird god, named for the shade found in the day.

Due to the nature of Caelia, they have no traditional crafts work and often sport various crafts from a wide range of cultures, from Drow to Harpy workings. Where they fail in the arts, they succeed in raw materials. With hundreds of pounds in magic stones, rare gems, and raw ore being produced from Caelia on a daily basis, they remain untouchable by most nations as doing so would risk a loss of these resources they carefully sell and trade for food and other resources.

Caelia pulls inspiration heavily from Roman Culture as well as the Macomb obsessions of the Victorians. The many holidays and traditions of Caelia revolve around their gods and churches, ranging from public shows of adoration, execution of heretics and traitors, and days of celebration for the safety Caelia has provided for their benefit. Though often, these holidays will begin to end with fighting as the two contrasting Churches clash over the means of celebration. With their closeness to the gods, something so many lack, its no surprise that the many in Caelia remain connected to their original magic and are often far more powerful underground

than their counterparts on the surface. In more recent years, the tensions have grown as a nation divided by nature began to show cracks after pressure from outside forces. Rumor even has it they have a working portal somewhere deep within the Caverns. To make matters worse, doubt has begun to seep in as groups of people have disappeared, and a strange 3rd power has begun to rise up within Caelia.

Omphalus Geography

Castennes

The Castennes is a seaside peninsula known for its good relations with the Fae of the Shine, naturally abundant silver mines, and the largest pier in Omphalos. Currently, the Castenne are overseen by Duke Neopolation Castennes. Under him, in the most recent years, port activity has slowed, the mines have been closed and barred off, and the once fruitful region is left for dead.

Formerly, the Castennes served as a midway point for ambassadors and nobles of the Shine to visit Omphalos and cut any needed deals. The original Duchy was killed during the war but was known for its forward-thinking and extraordinary magical powers.

Honey Bear Tavern

A tavern is known as a haven to any who can pay. Run by River and Midas, the tavern serves the dual purpose of safely removing citizens and criminals from the Castennes and into other territories.

Castennes Mines

The Castenne Mines were once known for having a large deposit of silver ores. After the war, the mine was abandoned due to the vein running dry. Though few know the truth, the vein of silver ran directly alongside a natural deposit of soul stones, one of the most dangerous elements to mine. Though the reasoning for the mine closing is unknown to most, the site is now crawling with monsters and similar pests.

Old Portal Site

The old portal site resides deep within the forests surrounding most of the Castennes. Once rich in fae magic, nature has been far replaced with the weight of the undead. Previously, the site of a hag's residence, whose role was to protect the portal and any that came through it, the hag has been lost for a long time. The portal itself was broken at the war's end, locking the Castennes off from the rest of the realms.

New Pier

The new pier is mainly set up for imports and exports. The pier is smaller and lacks the lavish detailings of the old pier. It was built for functionality as keeping the Old Piers open became too expensive.

Old Pier

A decorative but decaying site of the old Castennes. Designed to receive visitors and embassies, the style is built to house a marketplace with broad, beautiful displays of luxury. Nowadays, the pier is widely unused.

Guild Hall

The Guild Hall is a central hub for the would-be adventurers of the Castennes. A place filled with bounty requests, armory, and youth on the sites of the adventure that will place their name into legends, the guild has quickly become overrun by wannabes.

Castenne Manor

Formerly the home of the Whetherite Family, the Current Duke, Castenne, has taken over the residence. Filled with memorabilia from prior fae hunts and memories of a happier family, the residence was, up until recently, clad with iron alongside every gate, window, and wall. The manor serves as home to the Dukedom's army and original forces. It has since burned down.

Castenne Catacombs

A series of endless winding tunnels beneath the Castenne Manor, housing many oddities, including the Mutant blood hunting order labs, prison cells, and a strange small portal linked to the Fae Sea. These catacombs were once home to thousands of ghost children trapped within the labyrinth of the tunnels, unable to leave.

The Keep's Territory

Located alongside a rocky, cliffside beach, the Keep territory is a small barren part of a local count's land. The area is denoted by an intense magical aura, heavy hanging storm clouds and a fortress that resides along the edge of the cliff side.

Tidabet Commonwealth

The democratic kingdom hosts five former portals to Primordia, one in each central area. The oceanic kingdoms are one of the longest surviving realms. Despite taking the brunt of the blight

attack in the form of heavy pollution, leaving vast stretches unusable, most swam deeper, allowing them to survive.

The Dead Sea

A portion of the sea is so thick with pollutants that the waters are as thick as oil and sickly green. Sailors are taught to avoid the patch of water, and many clean-up efforts have been attempted, but none have succeeded.

The Forge Main Facilities

The Forge is located within the Dead Sea and is protected from its toxic waters by a complex clockwork system that generates a whirlpool to reach the subterranean facility. Housing all forms of manufacturing from magic items, armor, and even warforged soldiers, it remains on the leading edge of most growth the Tidabetian Commonwealth has had in the past 35 years.

Organizations

The Keep

The Keep fronts is a philanthropist and political organization dedicated to improving the lives of the common people and connecting isolated lands to resources that can improve their odds of survival. In reality the Keep operates under a mission of vengeance and repentance for the crimes and folly of the post war world, they seek no higher purpose than gaining the power and connection needed to raise everything down. political organization intent on consolidating power away from the Empire and towards themself with the hope of reclaiming kingdoms lost during the Dark Wars. They're run by the exiled Prince Manhar De'Keep, and seconded by Cotnatia of the Keep.

The Organization is known for entering towns and offering aid, food and celebration whilst negotiating power and control out of the leaders hands. In addition, they've a collection of magical artifacts, research labs dedicated to crafting new items/spell sigils and handling personal tasks of powerful clients in exchange for favors.

Internally, The Keep is known for its necrotic magics rivaling that of many death clerics and their orders. These techniques are exclusive to the head and the second but are often taught to other members of The Keep.

Their symbol is a Rook Bird holding a Rook Chess Piece above their head.

The current working members of the Keep are:

Cotnatia of The Keep
Manhar De'Keth
Imrie of The Keep
Demirr Wit

Players:

Umrynn
Raikiri
"Bean"
Coal
Paramoure

The Drunken Forge

The Drunken Forge is a mass Conglomerate with numerous facilities focused on the exporting of mechanical goods and inventions. The Forge produces and sells everything from weapons to medical equipment and even ship parts. Their operations are divided into three parts. Surfaces Shops that sell their work and serve as larger warehouses or repair shops. Travelers who handle goods and move them from the warehouse to the rest of Omphalus. Finally, the Factory, which resides within the Dead Sea and creates all of the mass produced products.

The true goals of the Forge are currently unknown. However, it's known that the Forge provides a home and resources for any who genuinely prove their loyalty. As such, many who are outcasts of society whether due to physical ailments or personal choices find themselves at the Forge's doorstep begging for work and a chance at a better life.

Rumors speak to a strange medical technology deep with The Factory of the Forge those who've experienced it mention having devices implanted within them or replacing parts of their body that function as their own flesh would, tiring at the same rate, requiring little repair and even less pains. This technology has caused hundreds to fight for a chance to work within The Factory.

The Forge is run by Dana's Ruhmallath as well as 4 Additional Head Scientist and 2 Foreman (His daughters)

The current working Forge Members are unknown and will be added after " Into The Forge"

Monster Encyclopedia

Monster

A monster is a vast range of species namely those of other realm magics and influence that create problems for nearby civilizations and peoples. These range from worms to dragons themselves.

Beast

The ancestors of most monsters, these creatures can rival the mountains in size and power. They pull from ancient power sources and are often found in larger sizes in Primordia. When a beast dies their bodies will fossilize to protect what remains of their power and lifeforce. Ceremonies are conducted by their followers to return this power into the world itself.

Titan

The Last of the Titans died before the birth of Omphalus. The ancestors of beasts and monsters, these creatures stretched so far they rivaled the sky itself in terms of size and the gods in terms of power. Little is known about them.

NPC Library

Trigger Troupe

Constants

“Z” Xerkuth

Z is the demon prince possessing the knife Rynn carries. To most, little is known about Z beyond the fact only Rynn can hear them on most occasions. They possess some latent control of their former magic from within the knife but remain shaky in utilizing it. Their ultimate goal is to be freed from the knife and Rynn, and they don't seem to care about the moral methods of achieving their goal.

Z took a shine to Cotnatia and Bean, though the reason isn't well known. They are haunting Rynn, who is now capable of watching them move.

Recently, Z's been revealed to have a fear of blights and a hesitation when it comes to his own memory of being trapped within Rynn's body.



Valamin Riverfoot

Valamin is a halfling bounty hunter who utilizes BlinkDogs as his hunting dog. Valamin is a laid back and casual sort who is only ever truly service about his work and the contracts given to him. He's hired for many roles but remains friendly with others outside his work.

Valamin was formerly friendly with most of the party until their involvement caused a withholding of information for his work and eventually the calling off of his contract to investigate the changelings in the Castennes.

Recently it was revealed he's on a more permanent level of employment with The Old Gaurd.

Pup

The unnamed Blinkdog Puppy. Full of energy and boundless chaos, the Pup won't have a name until it successfully completes basic puppy training.

Mimzy

One of the twin Blink Dogs, Mimzy sticks closer to Valamin and is a bit shy around unfamiliar people.

Lulu

One of the two twin Blink Dogs. Lulu is a faithful hunting dog, alert for every sound, constantly tense, and ready for a fight.



The Castennes

The Late Duke Neapolitan Castennes - Warrior King of the Iron Rights

Neapolitan is a human war hero who was proclaimed “Warrior King” by The Dark Wars. Though the victories that won him this title are lost to time and legend, he is well known for being a pioneer of his age in combat techniques and battle strategies and a known genius in alchemical matters. After the war, he was gifted the Castennes, a looming oceanside Dukedom formerly held as a ground for ambassadors from the Shine. In an ironic twist, these alchemical pursuits led to the creation of a Battalion of Blood Hunters (Order of the Mutant), and for the latter part of their services, they remained devoted to removing the perceived threats of fae influence from the lands.

During his reign, Neapolitan married and had five children. He also forged stronger trade connections within his realm, returning it to the thriving metropolis it had been before the war. However, years ago, his children began to fall. One by one, each child was lost, causing him to abandon his duties and lands, slipping further into his madness as a side effect of his experimentations.

The Duke is rarely seen or heard from, and his lands have once more fallen into disrepair. Although he is known to have close ties to the other Bloodhunters Organizations, not much else is known of him.

Currently, the Duke is dead as fuck

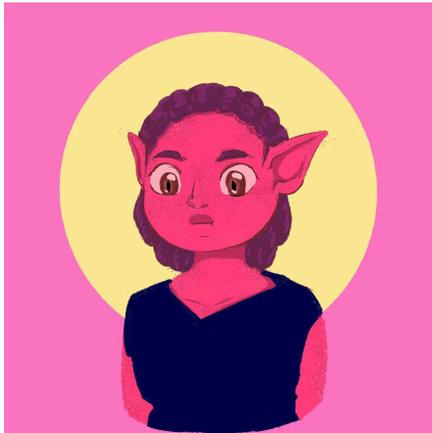


Francis “Fran”

Fran is a changeling child found within the Castenne’s Silver Mines. Unlike the other changelings they were unaffected by the Mindflayers influence but didnt seem to have any memories or sense of self.

The newly free Changelings couldn’t recognize them or their markings, deeming them orphans. For safety reasons, their current look reflects Messanian. They are currently learning how to be people. In their changeling form Fran’s ears are and arms are covered in black marks creeping upwards alongside the tips of their ears.

Currently Fran resides in the Lands Beyond and is often visited by Bean and Midas.



The Changelings

Discovered within the Castenne Silver Mines and around the small town of (), these changelings were originally lifeless and sickly dolls. Finding difficulty with playing human due to the mind control placed on them, they attacked the party upon any provocation and became a main area antagonist.

Upon the death of the mind flayer, the newly freed changelings revealed that they'd arrived close to 30 years ago, hoping to find a way back to the Shine with their clans. They've few memories of what happened or how they encountered the mind flayer. Currently, they're residing within The Golden Bear Tavern with the intent to seek refuge in a Forgotten Land provided by Midas.

Haje - "Healer"

Seemingly the leader and speaker of the group, they practice healing magic alongside basic wizard spells, though it is unclear where they learned these from.

In their changeling form, their mouth downward is a solid inky black. With their arms inked similarly, up to their elbows.

Rjo - "Cryer"

Distraught throughout most scenes, they seem to be more aware of the loss of their clans and their friends as well as their children.

In their changeling form, their mouth downward is a solid inky black. With their arms inked similarly, up to their elbows.

Toa - "Standoffish"

Refuses to speak to the party outside of basic pleasantries. They speak only in sylvan and shout to their fellow Changelings.

In their changeling form, their mouth downward is a solid inky black. With their arms inked similarly, up to their elbows.

Ilye and Jyx - "The Other Two"

Nothing is known of them beyond their being around and belonging to a differing clan.

These two were found within an alleyway among other locations, and are marked with randomized and dense freckles across their body.

"Teenager"

Recently discovered by the party, he was originally disguised as the Blacksmith of the town, only to have his memories returned with the death of the mind flayer. Seemingly they'd spent much of their life within this role as their memories stopped at a similar point as the others.

In their changeling form, their mouth downward is a solid inky black. With their arms inked similarly, up to their elbows. However, as they're younger, the marks go much higher.

Old Man Cooley

A soldier during The Dark Wars, his ran battalion and accolades are all but unknown to most. When is known is that the war took a drastic effect on both his mind and body, leaving his scarred and struggling to walk or move with a glass eye and a tendency to ramble about utter nonsense in states of madness.

Cooley remains a mystery to the players though he is known to be found drunk and stumbling around The Golden Bear Inn.

“Bec”

Rebecka or “Bec” is the daughter of the town blacksmith. She’s far better people skills than her late father and is more easy going.

The last the party saw of Bec was her searching for her missing father, only to be wrapped up in the floods of joy from the festival. Her father was found by you dead within the Mines.

The Drunken Forge

Pebbles Ruhmallath

Pebbles is a Warforged genasi that stands 7 feet tall, with the gifts of a dragon. A foreman of the Drunken Forge, shes been tasked with seeing shipments of strange crystals back and forth across the pier.

Pebbles is an overly cheerful and a bit dim young woman who tries hard not to let her size and difficulties bother her. She often speaks about her dad, Dazas Ruhmallath, though often provides very little context to his existence beyond a few journal entries and notes that showcase his familiarness with her more forgetful nature.

She tends to call Valamin “Uncle Val” and seems to have done errands for Lette, before her current assignment.



Cirohsa

Cirohsa is a Naga and one of 5 lead engineers within The Main Forge Facilities. She specialized in the structural design, manufacturing equipment design, and expansion of the work floor. She guides the party through a tour of The Forge and does so in a formal capacity for true clients. She is incredibly tired and no ones sure how big she is.



Pырhha

A drow and one of 5 Lead Engineers within The Main Forge Facilities. Typically referred to with some variation of "The Doctor" her speciality is medical equipment including prosthetics, life support devices and augmentation implants. She's eccentric and highly feared by the rest of The Forge, including Pebbles. Having a high tendency to ignore boundaries and morality, her past is unknown. She's respected by Dazas and its heavily implied her work is the reason for the Forge's success.



Dazas Ruhmallath

The leader/founder of The Forge and chief engineer of its facilities. He spent much of his youth crafting weapons and automatons on a wider scale for the warring cities and factions of the surface world. After taking in his daughter, Pebbles Dazas ceased his production of weapons and focused his work on medical enhancements. He's fairly calculating and patient but has aspects of himself and his work that he hides.

He is kindred to Cotnatia, the degree of which is unknown. And has pseudo adopted Alba as well as another daughter.



Nieve

An ice Genasi and the final lead Engineer. She oversees the "Ambrosia Project" and has grown closer to Bean and Rynn during the time skip.



Alba Tross

A harpy foreman of The Forge. She's blunt to a fault with a dry sense of humor. Alba is one of two foreman alongside her pseudo sister Pebbles. She's the partner of Rynn, despite this little is known of her nature or true roles within the Forge as he interactions are widely unseen.

She does have a pension for sinking ships, though its unclear if that's for fun or for work.



Lishara Ruhmallath

Dazas's EX Wife and ship captain of the forge. She's often shuttling new workers, tools, and equipment inside and out of the Forge. Formerly Lishara was one of the five chief engineers, though what she built is widely unknown.



The Keep

Demirr Wit

Cotnatia's orc bodyguard. Emrie's Boyfriend. Puncher of Azibo. Currently residing within the Castennes as protector of Emrie.

His hatred for anyone of Gunsmoke's bloodline is insane.



Cotnatia of The Keep

Cotnatia is a satyr and an ambassador of the Keep, an organization seemingly dedicated to the betterment of the realm. She wields potent magic, revealed to be necrotic in origin that she often offers to teach to others, as many of her students are seen roaming behind her as assistants.

Holding a poised and Noble Energy, she is quick to remind others that she is not a noble, nor has she ever been. Recently, it revealed more to do with the unraveling of the Castennes and

the nearby towns than previously assumed. She openly confessed to bringing the mind flayer into the Castennes and orchestrating the replacement of most of the Dukes guards, citizens, and personal house staff.

After a successful takeover of the Castenne Dukedom she employed the party to complete jobs on her behalf. It was recently revealed that she works under The Old Guard and is at their service for most aspects of her work and life.



Emerie of The Keep

Changeling Student to Cotnatia of the Keep and SO of Demir. Little is known about Emrie beyond their overall cheerful attitude and struggles with magic. Nonetheless, they're dedicated and kind students. In the most recent arc, she took on the form of Elara Castenne, the Duke's missing middle child, intending to replace him and turn the Dukedom over to The Keep.



The Old Guard

Delsu “The Stringent” Strato

Delsu is the pragmatic High Priestess of The Old Guard and the Church of Hope. A calm yet violent woman, she is also Lette’s older twin sister. Though not the active manipulator that her sister is, she is more than capable of utilizing shows of power and grandiose displays to ensure loyalty and cooperation. Delsu is a known germaphobe who despises most living things and tolerates her sister due to their shared goals and similar nature.



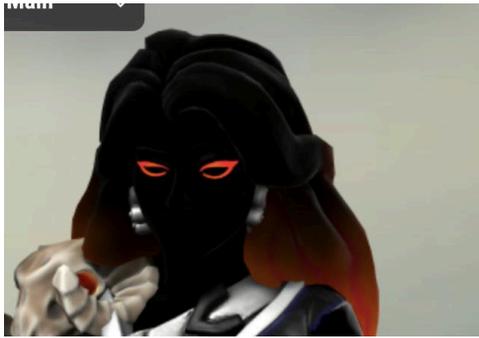
Lette “The Augury ” Strato

Lette is a street performer and fortune teller named “The Augury.” Her booth is currently within the town’s marketplace near the piers and remains open most times, though her services often go far beyond her performances.

Possessing powerful magics and artifacts, Lette is always amicable to trade for anything the party needs. Be it guidance, strength, or aid in identifying artifacts and strange happenings. She’s shown to have a higher form of education in her arts and is reasonably close to Cotnatia of the Keep, Valamin, and Pebbles to a lesser extent.

In more recent events Lette was revealed to be the Oracle and High Priestess of the Old Guard alongside her twin sister. Having spent years manipulating the lives of the players to her benefit.

Lette is a night skin with a form resembling a black hole, though her sign is unknown.



Brivo

Infanta Seraphine

Seraphine is a lioness who serves the Western Consort as a diplomatic envoy. She's highly perceptive and easily unenthused. Despite this she takes her work seriously and demands perfection from herself and those around her. She is the youngest half sister of King Arian.



General Emeritus Thorne Ironhide

An aged Minotaur and a former commander of the Brivan Armies. He's a strict by the books sort, and will uphold protocols above all else. Little else is known.



Baroness Willel

The Baroness is a harpy and the 3rd cousin of Consort Ezerea. She serves as a diplomatic ambassador and her work mainly finds her far away from Brivo. She's based off a hummingbird with the matching personality of being fairly flighty and fidgety. She's a gambling problem she works hard to keep under wraps.



Sir Mhin

A tigerfolk fair younger than his peers who rightfully serves as the Captain of the Royal Gaurd after his father's passing. Little is known.



Magus Umbra

The magus is a centaur with a lion for a bottom half and serves as one of few court mages. They are incredibly playful and mischievous in nature, much to the dismay of everyone around them. Centuar of Lion nature and a court mage. She has a distain for Bean for reasons unknown and harrasses the druidlings.



Countess Ivia

Countess Ivia is a Centaur and The Environmental Steward of the Hima Palace and wildlife. Little is known.



Duke Orion

Orion is a lynxatrope who serves as the Royal Court's Hunter. He's fairly leiz-a-faire and a romantic at heart. Notably, he refuses to wear a shirt and is currently seeing Osia.



Lady Celeste

A peacock aacrockara who's served for the last 40 years as the Master of Ceremonies and Entertainment. She is the epitome of drama and a childhood friend of Ezerea and Meyra.



Eastern Consort Meyra

the Easternmost Consort of Brivo, Archdruid of the Sheperard's Circle and Warrior Queen of the DireSol. Her court is made entirely up of young druidlings. Known for being calm but resourceful and concerningly horny.



Southern Consort Ezarea

The Southernbound Consort, Mistress of Diplomacy, Minister of Trade and Commerce. High General Emeritus of Hima. Handles most of the external court factors due to her capability to defend herself and manage others. Way too charming and a bit of a prnkester.



Western Consort Zenaya

The Westernbound Consort, Archdruid of the Dream Circles, Mistress of Divinity. Advisor to the High Courts of Law. She is wiser than she is intelligent, and serves as an advisor to the king and others.



Northern Consort Kresit

The Northernmost Consort, High Minister Infrastructure. Archmage of Hima and Warrior Queen of the DireLuna. Tasked with protecting the city and handling matters too sensitive for the king's eyes. A vampire and former war vet whom they're trying to give rest to and she won't take it. Harsh and Cold but genuinely loving in her own way.



High King Arian

King of Brivo, High Minister of Interior, General of Hima, Lord Paramount and protector of the Deserts. Tasked with ruling, figure heading and formal decrees and laws. He's patient and gentle and thus his consorts end up being the bite behind much for him. He loves them all dearly in a great many ways. Calm and Patient and Kind, frankly gentle in nature.

One Offs

Midas "Gilded Death" Astalli-Outlast

Midas is a tiefling mercenary. Retired for the past 15 years, she spends most of her time with her wife, River, looking after their tavern. A pretty literal force to be reckoned with, Midas is the reason nothing terrible ever happens within the tavern.

She's good with kids and less so much with people and animals. But she's known to have a soft spot for anyone down on their luck.

Recently, Midas has adopted Fran and is aiding in looking after them.



River Astalli-Outlast

River Astalli is the human cook, bar keep, and tavern runner of the Golden Bear. A force to be reckoned with on her own, it doesn't hurt that Midas also looks after her. River opens her doors to any who need it, from refugees to criminals looking for a place to stay. So long as trouble isn't caused, she hardly makes an effort to judge others.



Rouse and Leer

A strange undead pair of a Vulture and a skilled hunter, these two requested additional manpower from The Keep to hunt down a Night Hag. Rouse and Leer are a pair of Carrion Hunters who've long targeted Hags of all sorts. After killing their prey, Rouse and Leer attacked the party in retaliation and haven't been heard from since.



Arcane Misfits

Biscuit the Blight

The blight who resides within Saisha. Currently, they are at stage one of consciousness and wishy-washy with their choice of actions, communication and general activity level. Terrible at Dragonchess.



Captain Hoska of The Gilliflower

Little is known about Captain Hoska beyond that he works as the captain of a smuggling ship, and is equally referred as he is feared by his crews. A calm and decently charismatic sort, he takes a shine to anything glimmering an anyone wealthy, even when it leads him to poor situations.



Princess Anela Manaia

A silver dragon born and the 3rd Princess of the Anuenue Tundra, blessed with the Demeanor of the Dragon. She collects small things and, despite being 19 is still fairly childish in nature letting her heart guide her decisions and thoughts. Shes a powerful but novice sorcerer and takes her duties seriously if nothing else in life.



Tenumbra “Gold” Loste

Tenumbra is the surprise daughter of Prince Taulphrin. A ball of energy and poor decisions, she’s known for tormenting her father, stuff and the Emperor himself. During their first sessions, Emperor Zerim offered to look after the young girl in case of a dangerous situation, which has subsequently led to her being held as a hostage against the party by said Emperor. She’s been

promises a proper knife if she behaves herself, many agree she has earned it. She has since recieved 7 knives.



Emperor Zerem Kin

One whose motives were once thought pure, and whose goals are to simplify the lives of others while ensuring nothing becomes lost to time. They drive innovation and new connections for the empire while gathering and preserving old data of lost civilizations. Their pride and joy is a collection of all those lost in the war. They are the strategist of their counterparts.

Recently Zerim has shown his hand in the nature of his preservation of order and cultures against threats, often time perceiving those threats as the very cultures themselves. He's a tactician at heart and will utilize every situation to its fullest potential, often times manipulating political situations to remove and contain as many potential threats as possible in our swoop. Currently, his ambitions are to remove the power from and increase cooperation from the Anuenue Tundra, The Principalities and several of the remaining Monastic Orders. With success is in sight, alongside the helpful removal of quite a few loose ends.

Royal Family of the Tundra

Queen Noelani, King Manaia, Heiresses Ia and Mahina (Pink)



Into the Forge

Bauld - An annoyed Drow

Bliss - a happy cheerful Tiefling with Ruport Drop horns

Arc BreakDown - Arcane Misfits

Epilogue Written By ITSARIXY

tl;dr: Talphrin, Gold, Daeris (+ Dorris), and Arainia are escorted to Caelia (land with thieves and thieves guilds) to find Dirios

The coarse sand whispered under the weight of the worn carriage wheels as it journeyed along the designated route. Talphrin idly tapped his foot on the floor while his thumb traced the intricate path that Queen Noelani had bestowed upon him before they set off. Despite his years, his understanding of Caelia remained limited. Whatever purpose Dirios had there was up in the air.

Talphrin's emotions deepened as a flurry of thoughts rushed through his mind, each new scenario emerging with every jolt of the carriage going over a rough patch of ground. The very thought irritated him—he knows the human better than anyone. The possibility of Dirios being unfaithful left his mouth parched, his face involuntarily tightening, and his foot tapping on the wooden floor growing more pronounced.

Tenumbra ceased fidgeting with the trinket and looked up at Talphrin. "Dad?"

Talphrin snapped out of his daydreaming, becoming aware of his furrowed brow and his tense grip on the parchment. He shifted his gaze downward to where Tenumbra was, observing her with a contemplative

expression. Her curious eyes look back at him. "Where are we going?" Talphrin gazes towards the open window, sunlight pooling into the carriage and onto Arania, fanning herself egregiously and simultaneously casting a spell to cool herself off. "Dirios should be around here somewhere, Tenumbra." His voice drifted slightly to a quieter tone as he glanced back at his daughter, still toying with the puzzle in her hand. "Just wait a little while longer, okay?"

Tenumbra excitedly bounced in her seat in anticipation of whatever they were heading to. Her hair bounced out from behind her ears as she bobbed up and down. A stark contrast to Talphrin's pensive mood.

The carriage rolled to a subtle stop. Dust and sand cascaded into the wind, obscuring the sunny sky. Talphrin reared his head out from the window, noticing the opening of a cave, rectangular auburn stone carved by human intervention. Torches and coverings were perched on the front, seemingly a small gathering of humans, orcs, and other various humanoid creatures.

Talphrin vaguely knew of the various factions that formed Caelia, mainly that his many so-called "siblings" of Aetatish royalty would refer to them as zealots, pickpockets, thieves, and the like. It was easy to infer that this was one of the many entrances to the Underdark and other underground networks that Talphrin had a limited understanding of.

Arania carefully pinned her white, curly hair away from her neck, trying to find some relief from the stifling heat. With a creak, the heavy carriage came to a stop, and Anunene soldiers quickly moved to assist the passengers.

"Why have we stopped?" Arania inquired, peering out to the desert.

Pointing towards the yawning blackness of the cavern's entrance, one of the knights explained, "This is the entrance to Caelia. It's a labyrinthine network of Underdark caverns, spanning vast distances and even connecting to other nations to perform secretive operations."

Tenumbra shielded her tiny face from the blazing sun, shaking her foot erratically when her feet sunk in the sand. "Euugh— I got sand in my shoes!" She exclaimed loudly. "And it's so hot!"

Talphrin smiled softly at her, brushing a piece of hair behind her ear. "I know, sweetheart, but I need you to hold out for me for just a little bit more, okay?"

Tenumbra pouted, crossing her arms stubbornly. Talphrin chuckled under his breath, trying to come up with a swift response. "Look, once we find Dirios, I'll give you—"

“Another knife!” She chirped, eliciting an annoyed sigh from her father. “Tenumbra, you already have seven...”

Daeris elbowed the elf prince, smirking at Talphrin’s irritated expression. “C’mon, give Umbra a knife!” Daeris dug into his back pocket, twirling a shiny silver dagger in his hands with a faint chartreuse tint. Talphrin’s eyes widened, noticing the poisonous glaze, snatching the dagger immediately out of his hands. “You’re *not* giving my daughter a poisonous weapon.”

Daeris scowled, throwing his hands up in defeat. “Okay, fine—But you can give me my dagger back.”

Talphrin rolled his eyes, handing the elf back his weapon. As the group approached the caves, several warriors stepped forward, blocking their path. Talphrin raised his brow inquisitively, placing a hand on Tenumbra and moving her behind him.

“What’s going on?” Arania carefully touched the hilt of her sword, stepping backward to get some distance. A cloaked figure, presumably the leader of this particular group, moved closer.

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The cloaked figure eyed the group up and down, locking their glossy eyes with Talphrin’s. The prince noticed the figure’s eyes lock with the moonstone circlet adorning his head. “Far from home aren't you?” The hooded figure muttered. “What’s one of the Aetatish princes doing out here?”

Talphrin glanced towards Arania, debating on telling his true intentions to the anonymous figure. “We’re looking for someone in your ranks,” He paused to let the words sink into the opposing party, “and we have intel that they are within your ranks. Once we find this individual, we will leave.”

The cloaked individual looked at their members, shifting uncomfortably. It was clear, to some extent, that they had an inkling of who Talphrin was talking about.

“We don’t have any information on someone fitting your description,” Their leader responded. “Apologies for the uneasy welcome, the people of Caleia have their...” The figure paused, squinting their eyes. He glanced toward Daeris, their gaze intensifying slightly. “Let’s say reservations on those higher up in power.” They finish, a smirk adorning their barely visible face. “Who are you looking for anyway?”

“A human man. Dirios.”

The opposing group exchanged confused glares with each other. An armored fellow behind the cloaked figure placed a hand on them. “We don’t have a human here named Dirios.” They answered flatly. Talphrin’s eyebrows furrowed, confusion consuming his thoughts. The location spell couldn’t be wrong, the direction that Anela pointed them in was still the same. “...The spell is still pointing in this direction.” Talphrin pressed, furrowing his brow in irritation. “He’s here whether you know it or not.”

There was silence between them, the atmosphere growing heavier with each passing second. Tenumbra backed away from the carriage, surveying the tense situation. Daeris’s dagger glistened at his belt and eldeitch energy surrounded Arania. The hooded figure raised their hands in defense, shaking their head. “Look, I don’t know who this Dirios person is and-“ The hooded figure paused abruptly, their eyes squinting knowingly. His eyes darted in confusion as his gaze turned towards the cavern. Someone was speaking to him.

He let out a tired huff, turning to the elven prince. “Nevermind. Your little human is here.” They moved their head to signal the opposing group to disperse, opening the path up ahead. “They’re in the lower caverns, follow the tunnel to the right side, and there should be a populated area to find him in.” The hooded figure advised, passing a sharp glare to the group.

“And watch yourselves. The folks of Caelia don’t take kindly to someone in your...position.”

Talphrin gave a slight nod, following along the path with Tenumbra close behind. Arania shot a nasty glare to the group behind her, adjusting her gaze as the scene shifted. The once auburn, warm rocks suddenly cooled, smoothing out from the rough texture.

Talphrin’s eyes shifted once his eyes adjusted to the darkness. He could faintly make out dim lights floating in the air near him and Tenumbra. His eyes narrowed, limiting his focus on the bioluminescent fauna and fungi of the familiar atmosphere of the Underdark.

“Dad, Dad look!” Tenumbra excitedly pointed to the glowing mushrooms, her curls bouncing with her excitement. Her dark skin reflected a light blue hue in the darkened cavern. “I wanna touch them!”

Talphrin smiled, his eyes softening. He knelt on his knees, lifting Tenumbra on his shoulders, placing his hands under her legs, and slowly walking towards the glowing fauna. Her brown curls flowed freely through the air as she reached out to grasp onto glowing mushrooms.

Arania stopped in her tracks. The road was split into two paths. “Erm...w-which way do we go again?”

Talphrin diverted his attention from Tenumbra to the split road, scanning the surroundings, hoping for any signs that would lead them back to Dirios. “The figure behind us said to take the left path.”

“He definitely said to go to the right,” Daeris challenged.

“But what if he was lying?” Arania added on, crossing her arms.

“Well, why don’t we split up?” Daeris motioned his hands to the paths. “Talphrin, you go one way. Arania and I will go to the other.”

Talphrin shrugged. “I guess that makes sense. Let's meet up back here if we don’t find anything.” He glanced down at Tenumbra. “Are you ready?”

She nodded vigorously, smiling. “Yeah!” Talphrin gave her a gentle squeeze before letting her down, patting her head gently.

Arania watched with a small smile as the two took off together. Daeris, however, hesitated, turning to Arania, his brows knit. “Well...let’s go Arania.”

She frowned for a second, nodding in understanding. Daeris sighed, before heading in the direction of the tunnel in front of him. Arania followed after him closely, making sure to avoid any potential traps.

Talphrin watched quietly as Arania and Daeris disappeared around the corner, squeezing Tenumbra's hand as they continued down the path. Tenumbra sang to herself, her voice echoing loudly in the spacious cave.

Talphrin cringed slightly from the various keys the child would sing in, trying to tune out her voice to concentrate on the dwindling location spell. As they traveled further and farther down the path, more and more glowing mushrooms began to appear around him.

"More mushrooms!" Tenumbra gasped, clapping her chubby hands.

Talphrin nodded, eyeing her cautiously. The landscape wasn't like this before, everything was covered in darkness except the light of the enchanted mushrooms. His grip tightened upon his spear, his senses constantly searching the area for any possible danger. The prince squinted at the dark areas near their path, noticing a shifting figure, and quickly pulled Tenumbra behind him. "You stay behind me, okay?"

The girl gasped quietly, stopping her singing as he examined Talphrin's tense body language. Talphrin's eyes darted into various dark areas. Talphrin whipped his glaive, slicing a magic attack in two. Humanoid figures congealed from the darkness, swerving in rhythmic motions.

Talphrin flicked his wrist, a protective spell shielding Tenumbra from the onslaught. "Run to the tunnel over there." He spoke sternly as he pushed his spear forward, pushing his weapon through the bodies of the humanoid figures. He slashed another blast, watching as the creature fell backward to the ground.

Tenumbra scurried into the darker areas of the scene, watching the scene unfold behind a giant mushroom.

Talphrin ducked down from an assailant, blasting a spell in retaliation when a blade grazed his arm. Another attacker appeared from the darkness, sending a powerful strike against his side.

Talphrin grunted, holding back the pain with shut eyes, grazing through metal and heated skin. Talphrin lifted his foot and kicked the attacker roughly in their side. A loud and sickening crack reverberated through the cave as his foot made contact. Talphrin clutched his side, changing a healing spell under his breath to recover the wound.

Talphrin had no issue taking on this small onslaught, but the amount that was coming was undetermined. It was clear he was outnumbered. Talphrin gained distance, tracing his foot on the ground, the rock and

fauna shifting as a flood of ethereal light spread through the cracks, incinerating the next onslaught of the unnamed group.

With every 10 he would kill in one sweep, 15 would follow behind. “Get the prince!” One shouted before charging towards Talphrin. He grits his teeth, clutching his spear. Talphrin slid behind a rock to recover his breath, watching Tenumbra as his concentration on the spell began to wane. Thankfully, she got enough distance to not be threatened.

Talphrin reached into his pocket, ducking down from the spell attacks, and casting a spell to reach out to Daeris and Arania. “Daeris and Arania, can you hear me? We’ve been ambushed-!”

His ears strained to hear their response, the scene was far too busy for him to concentrate on the spell. Talphrin let out a sigh, lowering his shield. It appears he’s on his own for the time being.

Talphrin whipped around the rock as the spell attacks whittled it down to smithereens.

Terrified screeches echoed from all corners, the sounds becoming louder and louder. Talphrin paused as the figures suddenly stopped attacking, plumes of black smoke suddenly covering the vicinity. Talphrin returned to Tenumbra’s side, the shield spell wearing off.

“Wh-what’s happening?” Tenumbra fearfully grabbed the back of Talphrin’s cape as the entire scene seemed to turn pitch black and quiet, Talphrin’s eyes widening as he felt an odd sensation. He could vaguely make out the silhouettes of the attackers at a distance, dropping like flies from an unknown source.

“Talphrin!” The prince’s eyes widened when he heard familiar voices in the darkness, the bright door from a transpiration spell Arania performed, covering her face.

“Arania! Daeris!” Talphrin’s voice echoed across the large space. The two managed to find the prince, weapons drawn. “I heard your call through Sending—” Arania gestures to the dark area in frustration. “What in the hells is going on?!”

“An ambush, most likely,” Daeris replied, his lips pursing in frustration, the scene unearthing unsavory memories. “We have to leave-” Talphrin blinked at Daeris, springing into action as a figure careened out of the darkness, preparing to strike. Daeris whirred his head around, jerking back in shock. The assassin narrowly reached out to strike before hands clawing out from the darkness, the hands latching onto the head, twisting it to an inhuman degree before a swift crack. The figure backed away as the assailant fell to the ground lifelessly.

The group backed away as the human figure flopped to the ground. The color drained from Daeris's face as a mask— a stark white mask, seemingly disembodied in the dark bloom of smoke. The elf froze as the memories flashed in his mind, his chest tightening, his throat drying, the fear clawing in his insides. "A-A Blight--!" Arania charged a spell, enchanting her blade with arcane energy.

Talphrin raised his glaive, readying his shield. Talphrin was confused as the supposed Blight looked back toward him, its eyes locked directly onto his. The plume of darkness began to dissipate, the Blight taking more of a humanoid shape. Talphrin squinted his eyes as the supposed illusion dissipated. Black smoke became clothes, tendrils became hair, a familiar shade of brown and blonde. He gasped, Tenumbra peeking out from underneath Talphrin's cape.

"...Dirios?"

The masked figure stiffened at the name, his posture softening. As the darkness dissipated and the mushrooms' luminescence brightened the fresh carnage. Myconids, small and rotund rolled out into the scene from the distance, carrying the fresh bodies away. Talphrin felt the world suspend itself, frozen as he stared at the man staring straight back at him.

Arania and Daeris were stunned as well, both staring at the Blight, removing his mask.

Dirios's eyes were filled with tears, his mouth agape in surprise, as he took a few steps forward, raising one shaking hand to touch Talphrin's cheek, running his fingers gently along his features. "Hello Talphrin..." Dirios murmured as tears began pouring down his cheeks, falling heavily onto Talphrin's shirt. "I missed you so much."

Talphrin stood motionless, staring down at the person he loved, unable to speak or move. His heart pounded rapidly beneath his ribs as Dirios embraced him tightly, hugging his waist and burying his face against the back of his neck.

"Dad!" Tenumbra rushed out from Talphrin's cloak, hugging Dirios's leg. The human looked down, a smile immediately growing on his face. "My little moon!" He swiftly scooped Tenumbra in his arms, hugging her closely. He buried his face against Tenumbra's head, letting himself cry silently. "I'm so sorry I left you all alone, I should've warned you, and I-" Dirios could barely speak between his quieting words as Tenumbra poked his face, messily wiping away Dirios' tears. He chuckled quietly, nuzzling into Tenumbra's hairline, inhaling her familiar scent. "Oh my little moon, I missed you."

Tilting his chin, Dirios glanced up at Talphrin, who remained frozen in place, the prince was unnaturally stiff, his smile partially forced as he watched the scene. It was heartfelt, a daughter finally reunited with her true father. Talphrin's gaze faltered slightly as Dirios's expression shifted to a knowing stare.

Daeris and Arania calmed from the suspense, Daeris exhaling slowly. "What the hell," Daeris mumbled under his breath. "Talphrin married a Blight-"

Arania swiftly elbowed Daeris, shooting a nasty glare. Clearly not whispering quietly enough, Dirios diverted his attention from Tenumbra to the strangers standing there with his family. Dirios met Daeris' gaze and attempted a greeting to the newcomers, "Hello, we may have gotten off on the wrong foot. I'm Dirios. I take it you are friends of my husband's?"

Daeris sneered at Dirios as he switched Tenumbra to his other arm and reached a hand out towards them. Only a slight grunt escaped his lips as he moved beside the wall of the path.

Arania cleared her throat, stepping forward awkwardly, taking Dirios' extended hand. "It's...nice to meet you, sir. I'm Arania...and he's Daeris. We've been invited to your search party." She began awkwardly, ears flushing slightly., shaking his hand. "Pleasure to meet you!"

While they introduced themselves, Daeris took a step closer to Talphrin and nudged him a little to get his attention, "Why did your husband look exactly like a blight just now? Did you know?"

His tone was harsh as Talphrin continued to just stare forward at his finally found husband. There was no answer from him as they wrapped up the small talk.

Dirios finally let Tenumbra back on the ground, clutching her tiny hand. "Come on, I have a safe area you all can recoup in." The group followed Dirios, with Talphrin at the end, his brow unknowingly knit with a frustrated look on his face. His mind was swirling with questions, his face saddening slightly as he watched Dirios chat away with Tenumbra in his mists. Daeris scanned the path while occasionally looking back to Talphrin slightly concerned. The others hadn't noticed Talphrin's silence, talking over each other with renewed optimism.

Dirios pushed the doors open to the small nook he considered home. It was covered in misplaced documents, a homemade "cork board" with soon-to-be-completed commissions, and possibly his repertoire of past excursions he took over the past couple of months. Chairs and other furniture were messily covered by clothes and other accessories Dirios couldn't bother to clean up. A few papers and trinkets littered the floor, and some of them even toppled off onto the bed sheets. Tenumbra excitedly explored every nook and cranny she could examine. Dirios admiringly watched from afar as she kicked

and twirled around the various clothes on the floor. Daeris and Arania were idling to themselves, looking at the various wanted posters on the supposed corkboard.

"Okay, okay, Tenumbra," Talphrin picked up the small child, catching her attention momentarily. "Dirios do you have a place that Tenumbra can rest?" Dirios snapped his finger, taking Tenumbra to a nearby room down a rigid "hallway" that led off to the right. Dirios affectionately placed a hand on Tenumbra's cheek, caressing it.

"There we go," The mercenary smiled tenderly at Tenumbra, "You just rest here alright?" The little girl nodded, snuggling back into Talphrin's chest, and closing her eyes with a happy sigh. With one last pat on Tenumbra's back, he turned to walk out of the room, suddenly stopping in his tracks. Talphrin was a short distance away, standing there watching him curiously. "Talphrin?" Dirios asked as he walked over. "What's-"

Talphrin's gaze fell to the floor, his expression solemn as he spoke. He knew what he wanted to say, the words barely formed on his lips. "We need to talk."

Dirios stiffened, his knowing expression resurfacing on his face. Dirios hated that melancholic expression on Talphrin's face and hated hearing the hopeless tone of his voice. He wanted so much to tell the truth, to explain himself. He was tired of running away.

Dirios nodded in agreement.

Talphrin swallowed thickly, walking alongside Dirios to be further away from Tenumbra.

"I...I don't even know where to start-" Dirios choked on his own words slightly, averting his eyes away from Talphrin. The air grew heavy and silent between the two. "...I-I know...I lied to you about Tenumbra-" Dirios managed to choke out, his gaze still lowered toward the ground.

Talphrin sighed slowly, taking Dirios's hand. "Why didn't you tell me you had a child?"

Dirios was slightly taken aback by Talphrin's bluntness, mostly. It was something he considered that Talphrin would bring up the first time they reconvened. Dirios couldn't manage to find the words to even begin at first, but when he realized he needed to speak, he opened his mouth to answer Talphrin's question.

"...Because...because-" Tilting his head, Talphrin squeezed Dirios's hand tightly. "Dirios—" Talphrin inhaled sharply, feeling his throat dry up from the emotions in the air. "I know you wouldn't be unfaithful to me. But...what happened? Tenumbra is-" The mercenary's hands trembled as he spoke, the pain evident on his face as well as a hint of fear. Dirios closed his eyes tightly, breathing shakily before he looked up at Talphrin, meeting his gaze.

“Dirios, I love Tenumbra with my every being.” Talphrin began, his chest constricting once the next few words fell from his lips. “But she is not my biological child.” He paused briefly, searching for the right words. “Dirios, please don’t lie to me.”

Dirios clenched his jaw tightly. Tears beading in his eyes, he quickly wiped them away with the back of his hand. His face contorted into a frown as he shook his head, forcing himself to look Talphrin in the eye.

Dirios leaned against the wall, crossing his arms over his chest, taking another shaky breath. “Before I met you, I...” He paused, taking a moment to collect himself. His fingers nervously twisted themselves together as he attempted to form the correct words. He exhaled deeply, attempting to calm the rapid beating of his heart. “...I... ran from home, taking up mercenary work to sustain myself. And I met... someone.” He hesitated, glancing sideways at Talphrin, who gave him a reassuring nod.

“He was... a young man in the merc company I was in,” Dirios continued, clenching his jaw. “I thought I could trust him, and—“ Dirios trailed off, struggling to finish his sentence, he hugged himself with quivering hands as dread set into his eyes. “And when I was a-alone... he— he—”

The mercenary let loose a broken sob, burying his head into his hands. “Gods, even now I can’t say it—”

Talphrin immediately moved to take Dirios’s trembling hands on his own, trying to soothe him silently. The mercenary's trembling stopped, and Dirios slowly pulled his hands away from his face, turning his gaze back toward Talphrin. “I found out I—I was with child,” Dirios whispered, his voice weak as his body shivered with the remnants of the emotional breakdown he suffered earlier.

“I had no one to rely on, so... I kept her secret. From *everyone*.” Dirios explained shakily, his hands trembling slightly as Talphrin rubbed comforting circles into Dirios’s hands. “I was ashamed of what happened, there were times I would l-look at her and I couldn't even... ” Tears began streaming down Dirios’s face as his voice faltered once more. “When I met you, you were the best thing that ever happened to me... but I couldn’t face *you* with Tenumbra... and I hate myself for it.” Dirios’s voice finally broke into quiet sobs as tears rolled down his cheeks. He buried his face into his hands again, letting out a muffled cry as the weight of what he had done hit him full force. Talphrin stood, pulling Dirios into his arms, gently running his hands through his hair. He pressed Dirios's head to his shoulder, holding him close as tears began to fall as well. “I was afraid to tell you so I ran—” Dirios cried, squeezing his eyes shut. “I should've confided in you from the very beginning...!”

Talphrin remained silent the entire time, taking a breath to calm himself. He held Dirios as tightly as possible, stroking his back softly. Dirios felt himself relax within the warm embrace, they sat like that

until Dirios' sobs eventually died down to soft hiccups and sniffles. He leaned back slightly, resting his head against Talphrin's shoulder.

“I-I thought you would be infuriated with me, slightly,” Dirios commented, rubbing his red eyes. Talphrin scoffed, a dry chuckle following afterward. “I can’t be angry at you.”

Dirios felt his face flush red in embarrassment at the statement as he laughed softly, wiping the remaining tears from his eyes. Dirios finally removed himself from Talphrin’s grasp, nervously pushing his hair away from his face. “I’m sorry I— That I didn’t—“

“I understand, Dirios,” Talphrin interrupted, his hand brushing against Dirios's face. “I am glad you told me the truth, but I can acknowledge how hard it was to recall those things.”

Talphrin suddenly paused, realizing something. “Wait, does Tenumbra know?”

Dirios stiffened once more, the color draining from his face. “*Gods, no!* I—“ Dirios cupped his mouth, his brow contorting into a pained expression.

“Dirios... she might find out about this eventually—“

“No!” Dirios interjected loudly, his eyes widening. “She shouldn’t know, Tal!” He insisted firmly, grabbing the prince by his shoulders. “I can’t risk her finding out about—“

Dirios’s eyes widened in apprehension as he gazed behind him. Talphrin looked confused at the sudden silence before turning around, and seeing Tenumbra peeking out from the corner, eyes glistening slightly. “Tenumbra!”

Dirios stuttered over his words, attempting to act as natural as possible. “I-I thought you were asleep already!” Tenumbra was unusually quiet, tiny hands clasped together at the hem of her dress, looking down at her shoes. “Um...I couldn’t sleep.” She squeaked out, swiftly turning around. She hurriedly made her way back to the room, leaving Dirios frozen in place, horrified.

“Tenumbra...!” Talphrin gasped, staring after the girl with wide eyes. “She heard you—!!”

Dirios felt the dread sink in, his eyes glued onto the bedroom door.

He didn’t want Tenumbra to hear any of that, especially since it was a sensitive topic for both of them.

“I...I’ll talk to her, Talphrin.” Dirios hurriedly walked past the prince, following where Tenumbra walked.

“You stay here, alright?”

Talphrin nodded in agreement, watching as the mercenary headed straight to Tenumbra's bedroom. A sigh escaped Talphrin's lips as he watched Dirios walk off to comfort their daughter, the sight bringing guilt to his stomach.

Tenumbra fiddled with the contraption queen Noalani gifted her before she departed for Caelia. The visage of Dirios's pained face shocked her, not leaving her mind no matter how many times she tried to distract herself. Her gaze drifted towards the door, the sound of approaching footsteps catching her attention before the door opened, revealing Dirios standing in the doorway. "Hi, Dad."

Dirios grinned nervously, getting down on one knee to meet Tenumbra at eye level. "Hello, my little moon." He brushed the curls away from her face, meeting her blue eyes. "What's wrong?"

Tenumbra paused, opening her mouth, and closing it slightly. She knew she couldn't lie to Dirios, especially with the way he caught on. After a few seconds, she sighed, shaking her head sadly. "I heard you and Dad talking earlier..."

Dirios suddenly frowned, sitting back on his heels, a concerned expression replacing his previous smile. "Oh..." He murmured, reaching forward to rub Tenumbra's back.

"Dad, did I...do something wrong?" Dirios gasped quietly under his breath, the sorrow seeping into his features. "No...no!" Dirios shook his head, cupping Tenumbra's face.

"Tenumbra, you didn't do anything... Why are you asking me this?" He asked softly. Tenumbra averted her gaze, avoiding Dirios's piercing gaze as she muttered something unintelligible. "Tenumbra? If something is wrong, you need to tell me." Dirios urged, tilting Tenumbra's chin up to look at him. After what felt like hours, Tenumbra finally managed to speak. "I heard what you and Dad were saying... that I'm here because of a bad guy..."

Dirios blinked in surprise at the question, before frowning deeply. "Tenumbra..." He trailed off, not knowing what to say for a moment. How could I possibly explain this? He thought, his face contorting into a sad grimace. He couldn't break it to her.

He quickly got to his feet, turned away, walking out of the room. Talphrin jolted once Dirios threw the curtains away, pacing back and forth. "I can't do it—" Dirios groaned, running a frustrated hand through his hair. "I can't tell her that I—"

Talphrin placed a soft hand on Dirios's shoulders, startling the man a bit. "I'll go in there with you." He reassured, giving Dirios a small smile, hoping to ease Dirios' anxiety. "She deserves to know some semblance of the truth."

Dirios shook his head, his eyes beginning to glisten. "I-I can't—I can't Tal!" He whispered harshly, tears beginning to form in his eyes again. Talphrin exhaled slowly to control himself in the tense moment, tightening his grip to straighten Dirios. "What if I talk to her?" He offered quietly. Dirios hesitated a moment before sighing quietly, nodding weakly in response.

Talphrin removed his hands, making his way towards the door. Talphrin entered the room, pausing as he saw Tenumbra shift in her chair, looking up towards him. "Hi, Dad." Talphrin immediately noticed the dour tone from his daughter. Talphrin took a seat next to the small girl, placing a hand on her small back. "What's wrong, Tenumbra?"

Tenumbra shifted uncomfortably, looking down at her lap. She mumbled under her breath, refusing to make eye contact with the prince. "Why... was Dad crying?"

Talphrin gazed at the door, sighing when he noticed the faint shifting silhouette near the hallway. He turned back down to Tenumbra, taking her small hand. "Dirios... has been hurt. Hurt by someone he used to trust." The prince began, sifting through his mind to find the right words. "And one day... through all of the pain, he had you." His voice lowered slightly, letting the weight of the words sink in.

"And you were the best thing that happened to him." Tenumbra shifted closer to Talphrin, resting her head on Talphrin's arm. "You were the best thing that happened to me... to us." Talphrin hugged Tenumbra with his free arm, feeling small tears well up in the corners of his eyes. "But... Dirios is still in a lot of pain." He admitted hesitantly.

Tepid water droplets fell from Talphrin's eyes onto Tenumbra's shoulder, the girl flinching gently at the unexpected emotions. "Dad, d-don't cry!"

Talphrin chuckled faintly under his breath, wiping his eyes. "Sorry, sweetie." He breathed heavily, trying to keep his emotions together. Talphrin noticed Dirios shift outside, making a self-soothing motion, he couldn't even comprehend the amount of emotions that were raging within him.

"Dirios is trying to heal, and he needs our help," Talphrin whispered, squeezing Tenumbra's hand. "We have to guide him a little... Okay?" Tenumbra sniffled loudly, nodding her head. Talphrin squeezed her hand a final time, smiling softly at her before releasing her.

Tenumbra wiped away the remaining tears from her face, sitting up straighter in her seat. “Is Dad going to be okay?” Talphrin got to his feet, kissing Tenumbra’s forehead. “I think he will...” He said gently. Talphrin walked towards the door before stopping for a moment, turning back to Tenumbra. “Tenumbra?” “Yeah?” She asked, looking up at Talphrin.

“I love you.”

Tenumbra smiled warmly. “I love you too, Dad.” She replied, before diverting his attention back towards the puzzle box. Talphrin chuckled to himself, walking out of the room.

Talphrin let out a heavy sigh and stopped as he saw Dirios cover his mouth with a saddened expression, looking up towards Talphrin. He removed his hand, smiling sadly. “You are a much better father than I am, Tal.”

Talphrin frowned slightly, walking towards Dirios and tracing his face. “Did you mean what you said...?” Dirios asked weakly, voice barely audible. “Of course I meant it. Dirios, you mean everything to me.” He kissed Dirios’s cheek. “I don’t care who or what stands between us. You will have me. And I will be here for you. Always.”

Dirios leaned against Talphrin, wrapping his arms around the man as tightly as he possibly could, finally letting the warmth wash over his body in Talphrin’s grasp. “Thank you...” He murmured. “I don’t deserve you or Umbra...”

“You deserve every scrap of happiness we can give you.” Talphrin insisted, pulling back from Dirios, catching his lips in a soft kiss. They stayed there for a long while, simply ravishing each other’s presence, both of them holding onto each other desperately.

Eventually, they separated, both breathing heavily, their foreheads connected, their noses brushing against one another.

Talphrin looked at Dirios, seeing the tear tracks on his cheeks. He brushed them away with his thumb, giving Dirios a soft smile.

“*Come with me, back to Aetatish...*” Talphrin pleaded under his breath in a melodically Elvish tone, swaying Dirios in his grasp. Dirios stared into his eyes, blinking slowly, a silent understanding passing between them. “Talphrin... I want to— but... not now.”

“*Why not?*” Talphrin questioned, narrowing his eyes in concern. “*We just reunited again... and then we have to part?*” Dirios’s face contorted into a sad grimace, his brow knotted with frustration. “I know, but it’s one last commission. Just one.” He insisted.

Talphrin sighed heavily, pressing his forehead against Dirios’s, nodding.

“And I promise, when it’s over, we can move in together. No more missions, no more danger, no more secrets.” Dirios continued, reaching up to gently caress Talphrin’s cheek. “Just us.”

A small smile appeared on Talphrin’s face, moving away. “I know a place in Aetatish where we can stay,” he offered. “Away from my family, away from all of the attention...” Dirios couldn’t stop the bashful grin forming on his face. “You shouldn’t have to do that for me, Tal...”

“I want to,” Talphrin responded. “It will be nice living alone... away from people, away from responsibilities, away from the rest of the royal family.” He gave Dirios a light chuckle, cupping the human’s face. “But most importantly, I’ll be with you.”

Dirios felt his cheeks blush, moving his hair away from his face to behind his ear. “Alright...” He said quietly, leaning forward to capture Talphrin’s lips once more.

“You’ll... keep in touch with me through Sending?” Talphrin asked, pulling away a little bit as Dirios nodded affirmatively. “If not me, then at least Tenumbra?” He added hesitantly.

“Of course, I will,” Dirios pulled away, turning to look at Dirios and Arania down the corner, talking amongst themselves. “But you should take Tenumbra with you back to Aetatish. You shouldn’t stay in Caelia with your position.”

Talphrin hesitated for a moment before nodding, reluctantly leaving his husband’s side. “I’ll go back to Aetatish tomorrow morning,” Talphrin promised, giving Dirios an encouraging smile. “Try to keep in touch with us, okay?”

He watched nervously as Dirios nodded. “Goodnight my dear.” Talphrin reached out, placing his hand lightly upon Dirios’s cheek. “Goodnight.” He repeated, stepping away from his husband. Dirios watched him retreat into the room where Tenumbra resided. He waited until the door closed before walking down the hall.

Arc Breakdowns - Trigger Troupe

Beneath the Surface - The Castennes (Written by Bryce/Fawkes)

Welcome to the Castennes, approximately ten years after the events of the Dark War, where we meet our adventures, Azibo the Genasi Gunslinger, Umrynn the Half-Elf Rogue, Raikiri the Half-Orc Bloodhunter, Bean the Tiefling Sorcerer, and [REDACTED], having a drink and causing havoc at the famous tavern, the Golden Bear. After the chaos calms, the adventurers look at the quest board to find some work, and all stumble to interest in a particular request to check the Castennes Mines for suspicious activity. Thus, the Trigger Troupe was born!

Arriving at the mines, the adventurers heard sounds coming from inside the caves, only to realize it was a Changeling talking to themselves in the cave in an unfamiliar language to the travelers. Upon confronting them, the changeling sprinted into the caves, and the adventurers quickly darted after them to where they were introduced to the horrors inside of the caves. Some of the adventurers decided that they wanted no part in whatever was in the caves, the others, Azibo and Akiri, decided to defeat the enemies before them and travel deeper into the caves and find out its true nature, and found out its true nature they did. Although doing well in the beginning, Azibo and Akiri found themselves surrounded by Changelings and with no potions to keep in the fight, so they decided to make a run for it. Unfortunately, Azibo was caught and dragged deeper into the mines while Akiri could make it out alive. After confronting the group about his findings, the group decided to go into town to gather information and prepare to return to the mines. They meet a lot of faces like the fortune teller Lette, the bounty hunter Valamin and his blink dogs, and the warforged genasi Pebbles. The information they gathered was that the mine was owned by the current duke Neopolatian Castennes and was shut down years ago, it was used as a mine for silver ores, but soul stones were found in the cave. They were also told that the monsters inside the cave were most likely controlled by a

mindflayer, so if they defeat the mindflayer, they defeat the monsters. So with such little information, they decided to take matters into their own hands and confront the Mindflayer inside the mines. While the group was finding out about this information, Azibo wakes up in the middle of a road with no recollection of the events that transpired after he was caught except for a migraine that eventually subsides. Eventually, he meets up with the group and they decide to go after the Mindflayer and clear the mine. After a hard fought battle, they defeated the mindflayer and freed the Changelings in the cave. The information the Chaos Crew found was the the Changelings and the Mindflayer were not from this realm and that they lost their memories right after the Dark war, there was also a Changeling with them that didn't look anything like them at all and couldn't speak properly, they also don't recognize the markings on them, so they assumed that they were an orphan. Because of that, [REDACTED] and Bean decided to become their foster parents until they can find their family and named them Francis, Fran for short. The group decided to keep this anomaly under wraps and take the Changelings to the Golden Bear under supervision of the Astali-Outlast. Azibo also figured out what was going on inside his head. He was currently suffering from Ceremorphosis, a mindflayer tadpole that latches onto the user's brain and eventually serves as its host, making them a mindflayer.

Being in a situation that makes no sense to them, they once again make their way to the Guild Hall to find out more information on the matter. This is where they encounter the Keep, an organization that focuses on the betterment of the Omphalos realm, and one of the ambassadors Cotnatia the Satyr, who was in charge of this particular group that included Emerie the Bard Changeling, and Dimir the Orc Bodyguard. The Keep at this moment was hosting a small festival where all the people celebrated the landing of the Keep onto the Castennes. At this time, the group was able to confront Cotnatia at some point to talk about the mysteries of the Castennes. Cotnatia found out about the mindflayer and Changelings from [REDACTED], and although visibly frustrated with the news, was glad to be told about it. Cotnatia told Azibo that his Mindflayer wasn't able to be removed, but it also wasn't going

through the transformation process, almost as a timebomb without a timer. Rakiri was able to start an apprenticeship with Cotnatia to increase his magical capabilities, and Rynn was able to find out some information about how to help his personal situation. With this information, Cotnatia gained the trust of the group and vice versa as she gave them another task, to explore the Duke Neopolatian Castenne's Manor and find out information about the Duke's whereabouts. So the group set off to their biggest adventure yet.

Arriving at the Castennes Manor, they were able to get special access thanks to Rakiris connections as a bloodhunter for the Castennes, they were able to meet with the Captain Guard of the manor and request an audience with the Duke, who was presumed to be in his studies working on a project. For the time being, the group was able to have a nice dinner with the Captain Guard and find out more things about the manor. Rakiri was also able to talk about his past as a Bloodhunter working for the Duke and other similar things with the Captain Guard until a huge commotion happens outside the dinner hall and there stands the Duke and all his glory panicking about seeing children and all and all going ballistic from these visions. The group tries to help the Captain Guard calm the duke down but their efforts are going poorly as the group starts to get injured due to the efforts. With nothing working, [REDACTED] takes it upon themselves to set the hall on fire to get his mind off the children, and take his mind off the children they did as they suffer the full wrath and rage of the duke. After the commotion and the Duke finally being subdued, [REDACTED] was taken to a jail below the manor, part of the Catacombs, as the Captain Guard tries to figure out their punishment for treason. The group decides that they need [REDACTED] as they were part of the group, so they set off to find them. As they tried to find them, a few places of note were found. Azibo and Bean found a magically impulsive and almost unstable room that has unexplained properties, Rakiri was able to find the Dukes room and was able to discuss with the Duke a few things about each others past, and Rynn was successful in finding [REDACTED] and breaking them out of jail, the only problem being, the Captain Guard was able to find him as well. But after discussing a few house rules for

the manor, he let the group go back to their beds for the night. During that night, Rakiri, Rynn, [REDACTED], and Bean all went to explore some more of the manor and find out information pertaining to the tasks given to them by Cotnatia. While exploring, they found a singular concrete building with a guard standing in front of it and decided to check it out. With the help of distractions from Bean and [REDACTED], Rakiri and Rynn were able to enter inside the building and figure out why this building was being guarded. What they found surprised them as there were unknown markings all around the walls, floors, and ceilings. What they also found were the ghost of a bunch of Fey children who seemed to be stuck inside the building and unable to pass on to the next life. Together using magic, and quite frankly luck, they were able to free the children from this prison and Rakiri gained a new familiar whose name was Fiye. The information was later reported to Cotnatia and the next step of this mission was set in motion.

The next morning, the group was met outside with the likes of the Keep requesting an audience with the Duke, and due to the connections Rakiri has with the manor, they were successful for a feast in the manor once again. This time, the tension was definitely felt in the room as the Captain Guard and Cotnatia gave each other looks. Finally after a building tension, the main attraction enters the room, the Duke, to talk to Cotnatia about her business in the manor. Turns out, the Keep wants to take over diplomatic responsibilities due to the Duke's lack of attention to the Castennes as a whole and to help with the trades with other territories. Obviously they declined, but after presenting evidence for the poor state of the Castennes thanks to the new members of the Keep, the Trigger Troupe, as well as a incredible performance by Emerie by revealing she is the missing daughter of the Duke, Elara Castenne, they had no choice but to give the Keep what they want. Once that was given, the Keep intended to throw a party the next day at the manor, so while the Keep attended to that, the Trigger Troupe decided to pay a visit back to the Guild Hall for more information gathering, and gather info they did.

The group split right about now, Bean and [REDACTED] found themselves being interrogated by Valamin on the interest of the Changelings rescued in the mine and admitting they exist while Raikiri and Rynn found themselves taking the Captain Guard, Cotnatia, and the rest of the immediate Keep members down to the Catacombs to explain the use of the mystery room that Azibo and Bean found earlier during [REDACTED]'s rescue. Azibo, meanwhile, found their way to a hidden forest near the Honey Bear Tavern where after some digging, turned out to be the old portal site that connected the Castennes to the rest of the Realms. It used to be inhabited by a Hag, but after the portal was destroyed during the end of the Dark wars, she was nowhere to be found. Now the portal is inhabited by the undead of those in the wars. Eventually, everyone was called down to the Catacombs where Rynn and Rakiri resided since the Captain guard had something to get off his chest. It seemed the water on the ground that pulsed with magical energy is the Fae Sea and the Duke's "research" was based on how to get to the Fae realm and wipe them out once and for all. The Captain Guard had a major part in these experiments by taking innocent Fae children and slaughtering them in these Catacombs to help make the portal. After the realization of this information, the Captain Guard accepted his sins and was carried off with the Keep as the final preparations were made for the festival.

The day of the festival, the Trigger Troupe had a responsibility to act as bodyguards for the Keep to make sure that everything stays the way that it is, and it stayed okay until extreme magical energy started coming from one of the nearby buildings. It seemed Cotnatia was paying no mind to this event but Rynn had other plans. Forcing Cotnotia to tell him what was going on, he quickly figured out that the Captain Guard was "Atoning for his sins" and creating a ritual to release the dead ghost children in the catacombs so they can pass on to the afterlife, effectively ending his life in the process. Rynn decided to go toward the building and got there just in time to find the Captain Guard in his last breath completing the ritual and setting the ghost children free. Rynn decides to try and save the Captain Guard out of mercy and was successful, but no longer retained his inhumane powers. Meanwhile, Bean figured out that the guards were acting

a little weird and unresponsive. They confront Cotnatia about the soldiers and realize that these aren't alive and are in fact dead servants, the dead servants of Cotnatia, making her a Necromancer! She chose to do this so that the festival had no irregularities and continued to be perfect for the rest of the night. Eventually as the festival reached its peak, the Duke himself shows to give a wonderful speech and to invite the members of the Keep and the Trigger Troupe to what the adventurers realized will be their final battle in the Castennes.

So started the final battle as Cotnatia left the Trigger Troupe to deal with the madness overcoming the Duke of the Castennes. Lots of blows were traded between both parties thanks to the destructive nature of the armored suits controlled by the Duke and the delayed fireballs within them. [REDACTED] was found unconscious and Rynn was badly injured after both decided to, quite literally, fuck around and find out, by shooting the delayed fireballs causing massive destruction to the Manor and critically injuring the Duke. Rakiri, Azibo, and Bean were fighting their own battles with the armored suits and won their respective battles to join up to team against the badly injured Duke of Castennes. Rynn, thinking all was lost for him in this battle, stabbed himself in the chest to reveal a secret kept by him all this time, he was traveling with a powerful demon from the Shade! The Duke realizing his error in judgment and underestimating the adventurers standing in front of him, he decided there was only one thing left to do, to end his own life, and to take [REDACTED] with him. After the Duke was killed and the Trigger Troupe made it out of the burning building alive, the festival was finally over and the wounded would be treated.

After a few weeks of recovery by the party, they all wake up to officially be recognized as members of the Keep with their first official task, going with Pebbles to meet her creator in the Forge. Before then, it was time to say goodbye to a few friends and tie a few loose ends. The Changelings they saved all those days ago were making preparations to move to a safer spot in the realms while River and company decided to look after Fran while Bean went off on their adventure. Rynn wanted to say goodbye to Valamin and Lette as they were near the pier, but

Lette got a little curious as she was able to see a mysterious figure behind Rynn. Turns out the demon Rynn has been traveling with is Xerkuth, the Prince of the Shade. Other than Rynn, only Lette and Bean (Being a Sorcerer Teifling from the shade) were able to see his figure and speak to him, no one else can. It was also recognized that Rynn has a knife insertion wound that is untreatable at the moment. Rakiri was to have a temporary goodbye to his teacher Cotnotia as he decided to make his adventure with the Trigger Troupe and test his newly found abilities, Bean will always be Bean as they stole shinies on their way following the Trigger Troupe as well, a small funeral and burial was made for the fallen adventurer [REDACTED] killed in the line of duty, and finally, we say goodbye to Azibo, the Gunslinger Genasi that decided his work with the Trigger Troupe has subsided as he finds a way to remove the mindflayer tadpole on his person and continue his work as a weapons dealer.

The Exodus: Pantheon

The Gods of The Exodus rule as d

The Exodus: Blights

